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SUBJECT: SERBIA: UNMIK CAUTIOUSLY OPTIMISTIC ABOUT ENGAGING  
GOVERNMENT ON "PRACTICAL MATTERS"

Summary

1. (SBU) UNMIK SRSG Lamberto Zannier told us on September 12 that he was cautiously optimistic that he could continue to engage with the Serbian Government on resolving "practical matters" related to Kosovo Serbs, but expected slow progress on any solutions. Zannier said they were closest on a deal related to the reopening of the courts in Northern Kosovo, but expected no action until after the UN General Assembly. Progress on most other issues was hindered by Serbian attempts to reexamine the question of Kosovo's status, said Zannier. End Summary.

Serbia "Sufficiently Constructive"

2. (SBU) SRSG Zannier told us at the conclusion of his September 12 meetings with Serbian officials in Belgrade that Serbia was "sufficiently constructive" in talks, which he said merited follow on discussions. Zannier had held meetings with Serbia's Minister for Kosovo Goran Bogdanovic, State Secretary Oliver Ivanovic, and Ministry for Foreign Affairs Political Director Borko Stefanovic. He described the talks as "what must be done in order to get some result on resolving practical matters." (Under the new government, the MFA, and specifically Foreign Minister Vuk Jeremic, now has the lead on all Kosovo policy issues. The Kosovo Ministry, under Bogdanovic and Ivanovic, is responsible solely for the operational implementation of this policy. This division of responsibility is in stark contrast to the former government when the Kosovo Ministry, led by then Minister Slobodan Samardzic, directed Kosovo policy.)

Closest on Judiciary, Far on Police and Customs

3. (SBU) Zannier said his talks with the Serbian leadership had provided an "amber light" to follow up on plans to reopen the courts in North Mitrovica. Zannier had proposed to Bogdanovic to reinsert international staff in North Mitrovica to handle the pending caseload while Bogdanovic was insisting on including Serbian judicial staffers immediately. Zannier said progress could be made on this, but realistically thought it would not happen until after the UN General Assembly had voted on Serbia's International Court of Justice proposal.

4. (SBU) On all other issues, particularly returning Kosovo Serbs to the Kosovo Police Service (KPS) or reopening Customs in the north, the Serbian government was hindering talks by raising the question of Kosovo's status at every step, Zannier said. Resolving these issues would require greater will at higher levels in the Serbian government, he said.

Some Progress Could Lead to More

5. (SBU) If an agreement was reached on the judiciary, it could

facilitate agreement on other pending issues, said Acting Deputy SRSG David Harland, who accompanied Zannier. He said he was certain that Kosovo Serbs would ultimately go along with any plans which Belgrade endorsed. The goal, he said, was to focus on concrete issues which would improve the situation on the ground. Like Zannier, he recognized this would take time and said Serbia was in no obvious hurry.

Comment

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¶6. (SBU) With no other venues to address these lingering practical issues affecting Kosovo Serbs, Zannier continues his methodical efforts to find even the smallest space for common ground. Whether his efforts will pay off and lead to additional agreements will depend greatly on how much time Serbian leaders believe they have left to influence the developing institutional structures in Kosovo and whether the upcoming ICJ decision in the UNGA strengthens Serbia's political hand. End Comment.

MUNTER